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RR RUEHBZ RUEH DU RUEHJO RUEHMR RUEHRN  
DE RUEHLG #0294/01 1481139  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 271139Z MAY 08  
FM AMEMBASSY LILONGWE  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5266  
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0257  
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORPORATION WASHINGTON DC  
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 LILONGWE 000294

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [KDEM](#) [ASEC](#) [MI](#)  
SUBJECT: MALAWI: FORMER PRESIDENT MULUZI ARRESTED IN  
CONTINUED COUP PLOT INVESTIGATION

REF: A. LILONGWE 280

[1](#)B. LILONGWE 286

LILONGWE 00000294 001.2 OF 002

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: On May 25, police arrested former president Bakili Muluzi as he exited the airplane in Lilongwe on return from a trip to the United Kingdom. Muluzi was immediately escorted to a Malawi Defense Force (MDF) plane and flown to Blantyre where he was detained under "house arrest" at his home in conjunction with an alleged coup plot. Reports and rumors of individuals having been shot by police firing have not been confirmed and the country remains calm. Despite rumors that corruption charges might also be leveled against Muluzi, Muluzi's lawyers confirmed that there was no additional evidence beyond what was presented at the bail hearing of the eight alleged coup plotters on May 20. Minister of Home Affairs and Internal Security Ernest Malenga told press that Muluzi's arrest is a continuation of arrests in the coup plot but that nobody has formally been charged with treason. On May 26, police questioned Muluzi regarding the alleged coup, but afterward Muluzi told the press the claims were "laughable" and his arrest was "sad" given Malawi is a democracy. Muluzi will apply for bail on May 27, upon completion of the 48 hour detention window. End Summary.

Muluzi Arrested at the Airport  
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[1](#)2. (U) On May 25, police arrested former president Bakili Muluzi upon return from a two-week trip to the UK. Muluzi arrived at Kamuzu International Airport in Lilongwe and was immediately arrested upon exiting the aircraft. Police escorted Muluzi to a military plane and he was flown to Blantyre. Upon arrival in Blantyre, police took Muluzi to his already heavily surrounded home and performed a search of the premises that yielded nothing. Police are currently detaining Muluzi under "house arrest" in conjunction with the investigation into the alleged coup plot that surfaced on May 13 (ref A).

Initial Reports of Shootings Unconfirmed  
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[1](#)3. (SBU) Muluzi was scheduled to hold a rally in Lilongwe upon his arrival. Initial reports described unruly crowds creating roadblocks and throwing stones near the airport. Muluzi's private radio station reported that three people were shot when police fired in an attempt to disburse the

crowds, but we have been unable to confirm the shootings and press reports have been contradictory. While crowds also gathered around Muluzi's home in a show of support, there have been no reports of violence in Blantyre. On May 26, the day after Muluzi's arrest, the country remained calm.

#### No New Evidence

14. (SBU) Despite early rumors that the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) would add corruption charges to the potential treason charges, Ralph Kasambara, one of Muluzi's lawyers, confirmed to emboff that the detention was in conjunction with the coup investigation only and that the government only presented the same two pieces of evidence used for the May 13 arrests of original eight coup suspects. On May 20, the High Court ruled these pieces of evidence insufficient for further detention of the suspects (ref B). Minister of Home Affairs and Internal Security Ernest Malenga told the press that Muluzi's arrest is only a continuation of the investigation into the alleged coup plot. Malenga continued that nobody had been formally charged with treason yet.

15. (U) On May 26, police questioned Muluzi about the court-dismissed documents that described a plan to return him to the presidency through a coup plot. Afterward, Muluzi told the press that the charges were "laughable" since they were based only on an anonymous letter and an unsigned document. Muluzi said that he felt his arrest was "sad" since Malawi was supposed to be a democracy and to respect the rule of law. Muluzi's lawyers described the arrest as nothing more than harassment and stated they were in the process of filing for bail on May 27, the completion of the 48 hour detention window.

16. (SBU) Comment: The arrest of Muluzi was surprising given

LILONGWE 00000294 002.2 OF 002

the recent court ruling on the government's evidence and the lack of new evidence. While many were initially concerned the arrest could spark violence, especially in southern Malawi, the country has remained calm and continues to let the criminal legal system run its course. Barring new evidence, we expect that Muluzi will be granted bail and be allowed to move freely within Malawi, which should further defuse the situation. Although the arrests may be an attempt to harass and gain leverage over Muluzi as elections approach, the arrests continue to bolster Muluzi's status as leader of the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the party's presidential candidate while giving the UDF a cause to rally behind. End Comment.

EASTHAM